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ABSTRACT

This study used an optimal distinctiveness model to examine bicultural identity development in 212 Turkish adolescents (13 to 24 years old) who were children of first generation migrant workers in Germany and tested in the third wave of a longitudinal study. The hypothesis was that the consequences of bicultural identity for psychological well-being should be optimal when the needs for assimilation and differentiation and degree of inclusion into one's own cultural group are at an intermediate level of intensity. The model was tested for students with either high or low perception of discrimination. Questionnaires were used to assess need for assimilation, differentiation, inclusion, self-esteem, and adaptation, using the Youth Self-Report Form of the Child Behavior Checklist. Results indicated that adolescent self-esteem was higher at the point of optimal distinctiveness measured as degree of inclusion in the culture of origin than it was at the low or high inclusion levels. Three measures of psychological well-being (vulnerability, psychological and physical symptoms) were lower at the point of optimal distinctiveness and higher at extreme points. The model was best confirmed for adolescent males and for adolescents younger than 18 years of age. (KDFB)

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Acculturation, ethnic identity and well-being

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Abstract

Acculturating adolescents develop a *bicultural identity* which may be conceptualized of a *need to assimilate* to their culture of origin and at the same time to *differentiate* from it. The need to either differentiate or assimilate depends on the degree of inclusion in one's ethnic own group.

This *optimal distinctiveness model* was tested in a longitudinal study including 400 Turkish adolescents (13-18 yrs old), off-springs of first generation migrant workers to two regions in Germany. The study had three waves with annual data collection by means of a questionnaire.

It was hypothesized that the consequences of bicultural identity for *psychological well-being* should be optimal when the needs for assimilation and differentiation and degree of inclusion into one's own group are all at an intermediate level of intensity.

This *optimal distinctiveness model* was tested for groups with either high or low perception of feeling discriminated. The model was best confirmed for adolescent boys rather than girls and for younger adolescents rather than older ones.

Problem

Acculturation and development: A heuristic model. The project 'Acculturation and Development' (Schönpflug, 1995) attempts to separate changes due to acculturation from those attributed to development during adolescence. It is intended to achieve this aim by separating the predictors for either changes in acculturation or in development. A systematic approach was taken by developing a heuristic model including the following three groups of variables:

- background variables concerning the family, peers, school, biography, sex, age, and region of migration;
- mediating variables including dispositional personal resources and adaptive personal resources;
- outcome variables including development and acculturation.

The full model is shown in **figure 1**. The structure of variables has to be understood as a heuristic device for exploratory analyses.

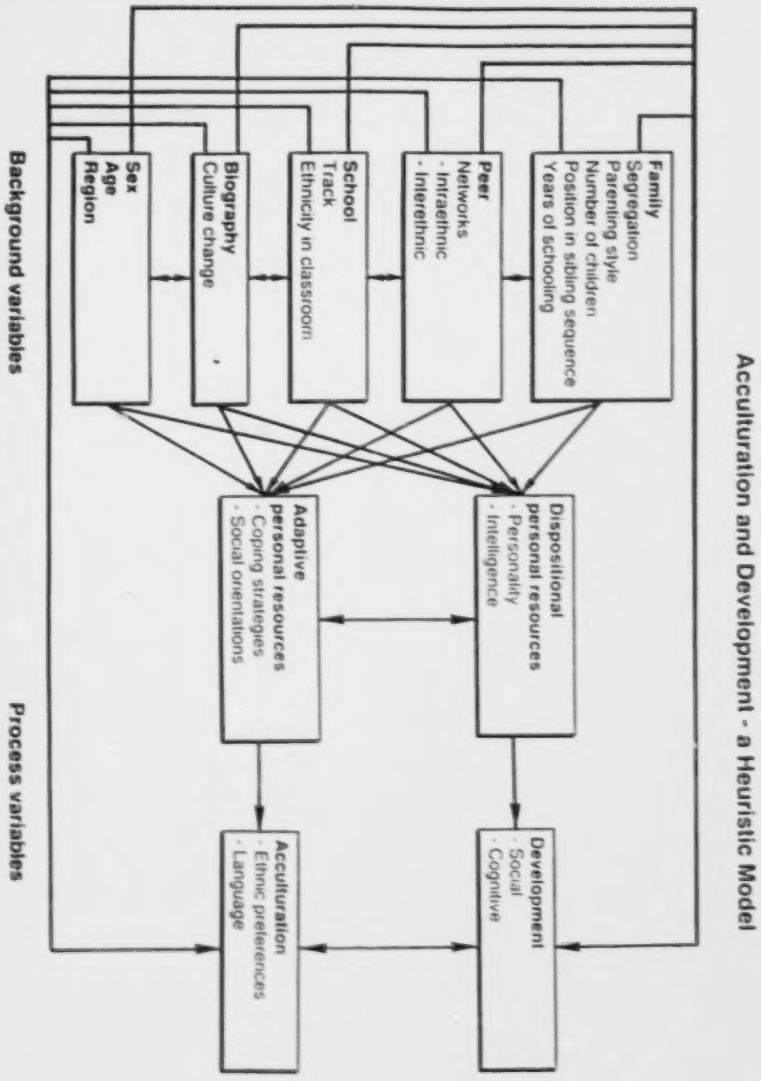

Figure 1. Acculturation and Development: A heuristic model.

Optimal distinctiveness theory. M. B. Brewer (1991) has developed a model of optimal distinctiveness in which social identity is viewed as a reconciliation of opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation from others. According to this model, individuals avoid self-construals that are either too personalized or too inclusive and instead define themselves in terms of distinctive category memberships.

Her position is that social identity derives from a fundamental tension between human needs for validation and similarity for others on the one hand and a countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation on the other.

Needs for assimilation and differentiation are represented as opposing forces, along the abscissa inclusion. It is assumed that within a given ethnic group context, an individual can be categorized (by self or others) along a dimension of social inclusiveness that ranges from uniqueness at one extreme to total submersion in the ethnic group context at the other (**see Figure 2)**

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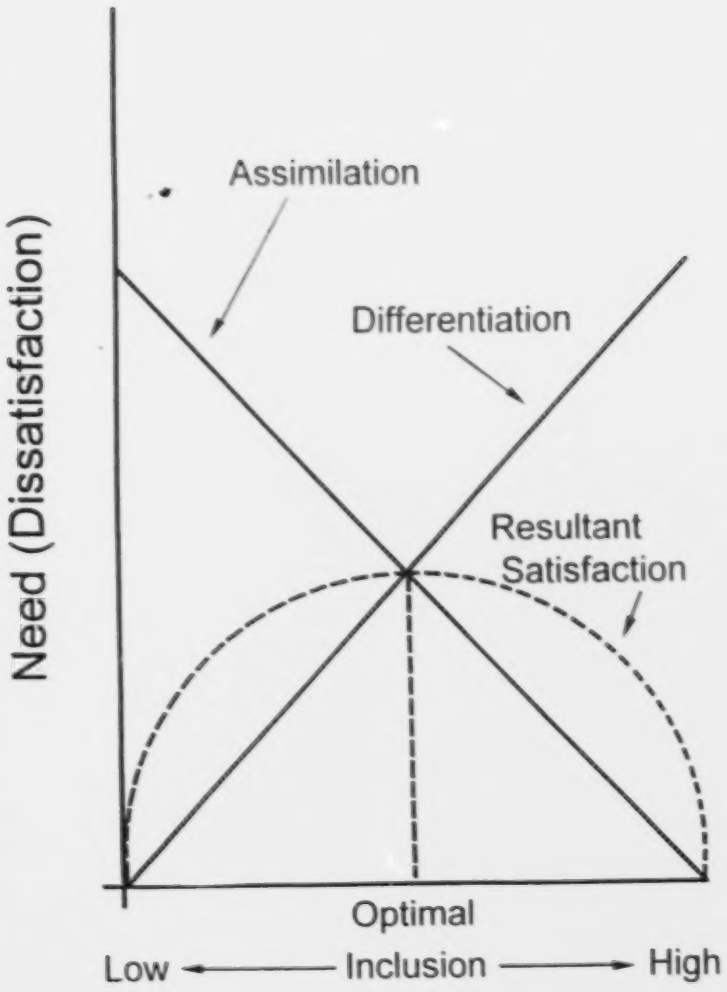

Figure 2. Brewers' (1991) Optimal distinctiveness-model of social identity

Brewer assumed that the resultant satisfaction is optimal at intermediate levels of the needs of assimilation and differentiation and at an intermediate level of inclusiveness.

Hypotheses

We assume that

1. assimilation to and differentiation from one's own ethnic group are opposing needs;
2. the need for differentiation increases and the need for assimilation decreases with degree of inclusion in one's own ethnic group;
3. in a balanced state characterized by intermediate levels of the needs of assimilation and differentiation and the inclusion in ethnic group of origin self-esteem, vulnerability, psychic symptoms of distress, and physical symptoms will be at an optimal level.

Measures

Need of assimilation. Need of assimilation was measured by 4 items developed in the project (Cronbach's Alpha= .50).

Need of differentiation. Need of differentiation was measured by 5 items developed in the project (Cronbach's Alpha=.84).

Inclusion. Inclusion was measured by using a collectivism scale after Triandis (1995) (Cronbach's Alpha =.58).

Self-esteem. Seven items from the original Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1965) scale of self-esteem were selected (Cronbach's Alpha = .86).

Youth Self-Report Form of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1987). The German adaptation was made by Lösel et al. (1991). Cronbachs Alpha for vulnerability was .63, for psychological symptoms .82, while physical symptoms were added up to an index.

Sample and longitudinal design

The model was tested in wave 3 of a longitudinal study including in the third wave 212 Turkish youth living in Berlin aged between 13 and 24 years. Only in the first wave the participants were tested together with their same sex parent. In the first wave an additional sample of 200 same-sex parent-child dyades each were tested in Istanbul and in Southern Germany.

The adolescents attended the most common types of schools available in Germany and Istanbul.

Results

Optimal distinctiveness and self-esteem. **Figure 3** shows the resultant self-esteem for the 13 to 17.5 years old Turkish teenagers: Self-esteem is highest at the point of optimal distinctiveness. The extreme levels differ significantly from the optimal level, but not from each other ($F(2,75=3.18^{*})$).

Optimal distinctiveness and psychological well-being: Vulnerabality, psychological and physical symptoms. **Figure 4** depicts the three outcomes of psychological well-being (vulnerabality, psychological and physical symptoms) at the point of optimal distinctiveness. All three indicators reveal their lowest levels at the point of optimal distinctiveness and higher levels at extreme points. The outcome is most distinct for vulnerabality. Not all levels of all indicators differ significantly from each other.

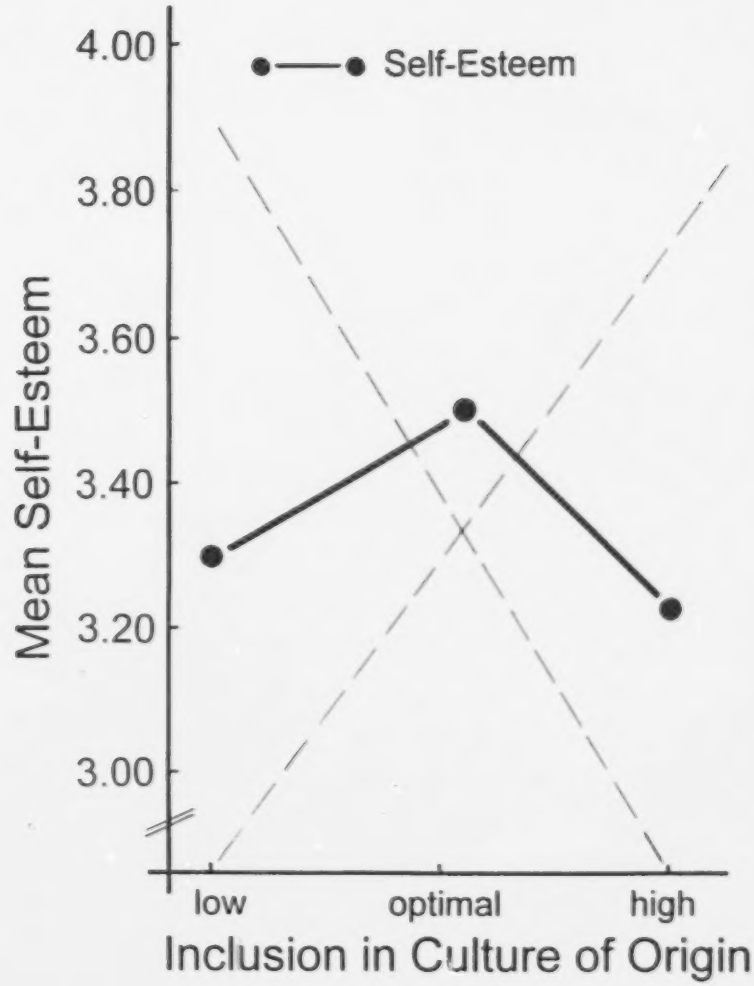

Figure 3. Optimal distinctiveness of ethnic identity and self-esteem

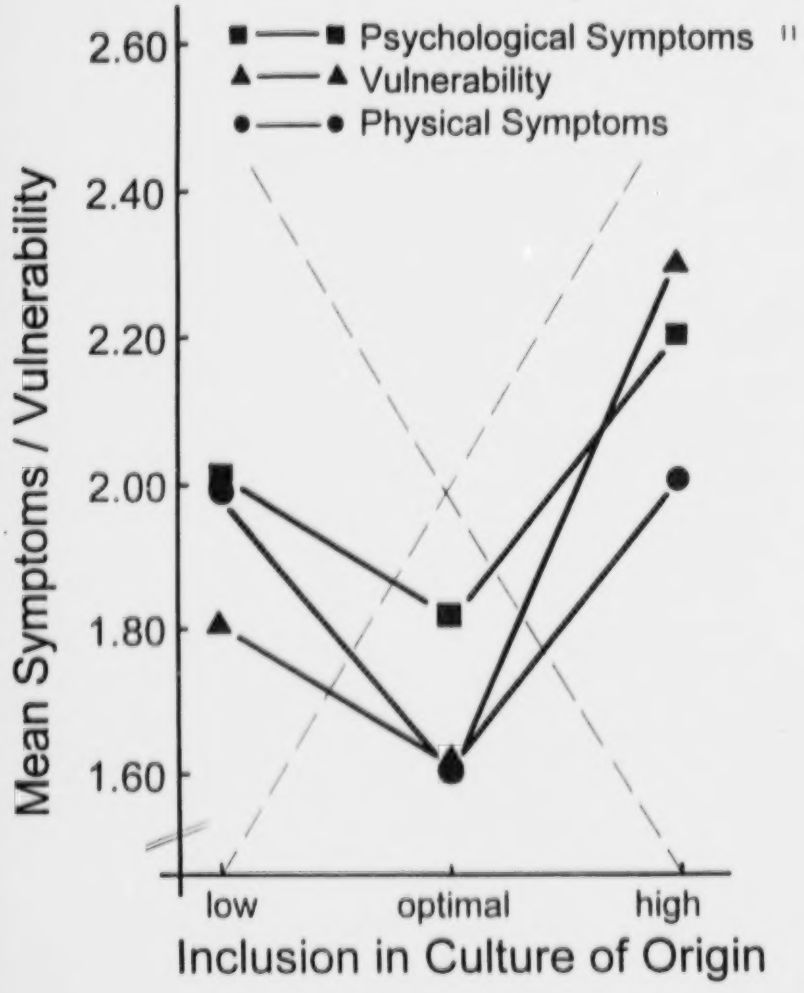

Figure 4. Optimal distinctiveness and three indicators of psychological well-being (vulnerability, psychological and physical symptoms)

Conclusions

The results partially confirm Brewers' model of optimal distinctiveness. At the optimal point of distinctiveness self-esteem was highest as compared to either low or high levels of inclusion into own ethnic group and corresponding low and high levels of the needs of assimilation and differentiation from own ethnic group. Vulnerability, psychological and physical symptoms were consistently lowest at the point of optimal distinctiveness. The model was not confirmed for young adults (18 yrs and older and girls when analysed separately).

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